

A PAIR OF CRANKS.

By H. M. GREENE.

CHAPTER IX.

ABOVE THE CROWD.

The trial of Nettie Ford for arson was long remembered in Blackstone county, not on account of the contest of the attorneys, for the utmost good feeling and agreement of opinions prevailed between the opposing counsel, neither for a surprise in the verdict, for no verdict was reached. In fact, the popular sentiment had concluded some time before the day set for the commencement of the case that Deborah Shrouds was alone the guilty party. This belief of itself would have prevented a conviction of the accused. To add to the difficulties of the state's attorney the witness-in-chief, Amos Williams, was nowhere to be found. So that gentleman, in the best spirit, and with a most winning grace, declared when the case was called that he was satisfied that there was nothing whatever to hold Miss Ford upon, and moved the court to enter a *nolle prosequi*, which was accordingly done without loss of time, and Miss Nettie Ford was declared once more a free woman. The judge laid especial emphasis upon this statement: "I congratulate you, Miss Ford, that you are thus exonerated. Let no one henceforth remember this unfortunate episode during which you stood under the shadow of a crime. You go from this court as fully absolved of the suspicion of wrongdoing as though the charge had never been made," and the fat, well-fed representative of the law rubbed his slick hands together as though washing from them possible stains.

Then came the surprise. Nettie Ford rose, and with a voice somewhat quaking at first, but soon becoming steady and distinct said: "Your honor, is this all the redress an innocent woman can receive who has been rudely arrested, flung into jail, and forced for months to lie under the accusation of a criminal act? It is easy, it seems to me, for you to say to me, 'Go in peace, and bear away the assurance of your innocence.' I have never borne anything else during all this terrible ordeal. Is it a little thing that a woman, who cannot vote for the men who make the laws, who owes no relation to the laws but that of prisoner, who is never recognized in her own proper right as a citizen, except when she becomes a criminal—is it a little thing, your honor, that an innocent woman, a pure and proud woman, shall find herself the target of vile and villianous tongues, and banned and branded as a felon? Do you think that a few soft words, such as you have just uttered will compensate for this awful wrong?"

By this time the awe-struck baliff had found his voice, and piped out, "Order in court! Sit down, madam!" while the judge rubbed his hands harder than ever, and fidgeted on his revolving chair. But Nettie stood her ground.

"I ask for an answer, your honor. Is there no recompense that you can offer me for this wrong done me in this court?"

The judge quailed as the indignant woman looked into his eyes, and faltered, "Why, as to that, madam, this is but one of the exigencies of justice. Justice is blind, you know," with a feeble grin, "and sometimes selects

the wrong victim. No more, Miss—Ford—no more—really no use—glad you are—free—next case—ah, I see—State vs. Fothergill. Are you ready, gentlemen? Good-bye, Miss—Ford."

To this day Nettie's question remains unanswered.

The celebration of a century of progress in the life of a great nation conveys to all people's of earth the most impressive lesson which man and his creations are capable of imparting. It is the apotheosis of the modern man, for from the head of everything speaks the voices of infinite study, patience and toil, the plaint of poverty and neglect in construction, of tardy appreciation and ill-recompensed endeavors after accomplishment. There is unrequited love, foiled ambition, perpetual anxiety, the hiss of jealous rivals and the cuck-oo chorus of small detractors. Every invention, every fabric and production has been forced to run the gauntlet of savage enemies to the accompaniment of the barbaric cry which has even cheered the blows of the flagellants upon the unfortunate, who has dared to think or act in advance of the dullest of his day. A collection of martyrs, truly, and like all martyrs happy in posthumous fame. They have won the crown of triumph, and henceforth are canonized in the minds of the executioners who pelted them to glory.

But why speak of the pathetic phase of anything, when the brighter view so readily smiles in our faces? Who remembers the dust and weariness of the march, the pangs of unassuaged hunger and thirst, aye, the shock and smoke and battle blood of the approach, when the bugler sings victory, and the bells all over the land chant *Te Deum* at the consummation? Victory is here in all these works, radiant, almost vocal in her sublime assertion. Work almost infinite in endurance, in pain of procrastination, but it hath wrought out success, and success in this age stands for all.

America sent notice to the nations that she would be "at home" on the hundredth anniversary of her majority, and asked them to come and see her, bringing something of the distinctive work of each country as a contribution to a picnic of materialism. Come to this old city—old on this side—of brotherly love, whose streets are as straight as the ethics of her people, whose dwellings are as uniform as their genius, and whose site is as flat as its society! Come and bring your best!

They came; 10 millions of them, citizens and aliens. And among the 10 millions were the young people we left in the court room. It does not once occur to them in the throng which surges around them so densely and unconcernedly that they seem to be shut up to themselves and to a solitude deeper than that of the lone sea shore. They are aimlessly drifting on with the tide which covers the broad grounds and eddies around those great buildings and flows in and out of them all day. Are they weary? Possibly. Yet this seclusion is to them, silly in love, unexpectedly sweet. The fever of the honeymoon has never been broken. They are fit for nothing or for no society save themselves.

I wonder if it be not possible by some process of natural selection, careful training and unflagging watchfulness to create a marital condition which shall be cool and calculating in its first stages, and which shall warm up imperceptibly as time advances and the connection continues until the arenas of love be realized in the later days of the pair? I mean nothing here to apply to the instinctive, the marital relations of the wedded. That will go its own way spite the teachings of Aristotle or Solomon. It has but an inferior place in the Hymenian temple. The touch which speaks better things than even the voice, the look which fits eye to eye as responsively and as blissfully as lip to lip, confidence, regard, respect, founded upon a mutual absorption which outlasts human life and looks out on the strandless ocean of the evermore. Why may not this flower of futurity burst into fullest bloom when locks are gray and the crowsfeet brand our temples? But until this process is discovered, and I presume that will be when everybody can say "eyther" without blushing, when John Sherman can agree with Dick Bland on a bimetallic basis, or when Pope Bob celebrates high mass in St. Patrick's, people of all ages will fall into the disease known as love, and fall out again as easily and as causelessly.

Charlie and Nettie, as known to each other when "darling" and "dear" did not represent each, one beautiful June morning drifted on until they found themselves on George's hill. From this slight elevation a complete panorama of the magnificent view, sylvan and urban, opened to the entranced gaze. Beneath their feet lay the extensive grounds, with its great edifices, fewer in number and less in extent than those at the greater show at Chicago, but the most capacious up to that time of any international fair. Along the tree-bordered avenues poured crowds of pedestrians, massed most around the several buildings. There were glimpses of little lakes, half hidden under the cool, green foliage of arbored groves. Yonder, like a silver ribbon lying in slight curves upon the picture, glinted the Schuylkill, embalmed as securely in its crisp, aboriginal name as cosily embowered in woods, the lineal descendants of the elm under which the shrewd Quaker drove a close bargain for a principality in the name of philanthropy. Beyond the river, alive with boats, and spanned by a number of high bridges, lay the city, a vast meadow of houses, thickly beset with spires and towers which shot out from the uniform growth below, like tall weeds from a bed of onions. But in the morning light of a rare June day, and to the eyes of a couple of mutual devotees, who could see nothing hideous even in the architecture of the agricultural building below them, or hear nothing majestic in the strains of "Was Ist des Deutschen Vaterland" (it was German Freethinkers' day, and by a delicious *contretemps* of which the average fair managers are so capable, of the god-in-the-constitution cranks as well) a view of the acme of commonplace, such as Philadelphia offers from the land side well accorded with their quiet, silver-gray happiness.

CHAPTER X.

AN INVESTMENT IN UTOPIA.

Neither spoke for some time. Their hands were deposited each in the others. What other place of deposit so safe and natural? They sat on a rustic bench long enough to accommodate

four persons. It would have held three average adults besides this couple. Which proves that estimations do not always estimate. Nettie looked beyond at the scenery. Charlie was trying to determine in his mind whether a certain curl was not more bewitching when out of place and saucily poking itself over her forehead, than when demurely tucked away under her sunshade hat. At last she, seeming to catch the idea away out yonder somewhere, asked solemnly:

"I wonder if Habakkuk is down there?"

As her eyes swept over the view, returning they fell upon a couple who were coming toward them on the Belmont drive, having been probably late visitors at the agricultural building. The man she instantly recognized as their old friend Habakkuk Shrouds. As they came within short range that worthy began to fire one of his interminable speeches.

"My dear young friends," he began, "never in this world of changes and vicissitudes here below was I gladder to see anybody. A word in secret, I said lately when meetin' another traveler through this vale uv tears, she bein' nobuddy but my concert Deborah Shrouds, but bein' as I am at present, under the cloud of her wrath, an' dare not speak to her till future orders is giv, I wanter introduce Mrs. Shrouds, Mrs. Calvin, Mr. Calvin, good friends er mine. Mrs. Shrouds is not the one who did a cutting act we hev hearn tell of as she'll tell ye herself. Well, how do you like it, eh?" addressing Calvin as he shook hands with both, while Mrs. Shrouds deigned to lay her clammy claw in their palms, and with a far-away stony stare at the atmosphere above Calvin's head remarked as to some power or the air.

"If he has told you that I was ever suspected of a felonious act, it would be no more than I should expect of *Him*," the pronoun ever emphatically capitalised. "He lets pass no occasion to insult me," she added very significantly, "when I am absent."

"If so be that people's characters is pe-uliar," responded the assailed party, "people shouldn't scringe. Ask her if I ever treated her disrespectful to her knowledge."

"Ask him," the irate spouse broke in, "if he wants to keep up a fight which is wearing me into the grave? Ask him if he can bye an' bye look on my poor head-stun an' read, unmoved, the touchin' inscription which I will have inscribed onto it, 'Deborah Shrouds nee Starbuck, Died of a Broken Heart.'" Ask him if in denying him the right for a time to address me he is not justly punished for his unfeeling conduct?"

"Lord!" laughed Habakkuk, "ask an' it shall be given unto you. What all this sniffin' an' whinin' an' pantods is for, nobody knows. If I could only make up my min' to take the English plan an' use a small stick not bigger than my finger," holding up a digit almost as thick and black as a link of bologna, "there'd be peace. No pantods for me, I say. Poutin' I stan' for a time, but pantods, never!" At which dire thrust, the object sank into a convenient seat, and seemed engaged in the mute preparation of an addition to the memorial inscription. This seeming surrender emboldened her spouse who poured in a parting volley.

"'Died of a broken heart.' Sure's ye live, if that line goes on the stun, I'll cut it eout an' put in its place 'Died of the Pantods.' But I won't, either, for I'll get rid of the pantods afore she